Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Tawny Frogmouth with two chicks, Castlemaine
photo by Noel Young, October 20th

Plugging a Gap: Restoring Wetlands in the south-west of Victoria and south-east of South Australia

Talk by Dr Greg Kerr, Senior Ecologist, Nature Glenelg Trust.

At our October meeting, Dr Greg Kerr presented a fascinating, informative and inspiring talk on the challenges and successes of wetland restoration across SW Victoria and SE of neighbouring South Australia. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the mid 19th century, these areas were covered by grasslands and woodlands broken up by extensive, mainly freshwater wetlands and the cones of many small volcanoes. The essence of this landscape was captured by Eugene von Guérard in his 1856 painting of the Grampians from the South showing the landscape in the vicinity of Walkers Swamp. Today across the region, 95% of these native grasslands and 65% of the wetlands have disappeared, and many of the woodlands have either gone or been severely degraded. The clearing of vegetation and the draining of wetlands have been driven by the expansion of modern farming practices. Wetlands were lost incrementally with the shallowest drained first, sometimes into deeper wetlands that may have been drained in turn as engineering practices developed.

In recent years, work by the environmental NGO Nature Glenelg Trust (NGT) has seen the reversal of this story with over 40 wetlands undergoing restoration. Farmers and other landholders are realising they or their predecessors went too far in draining many wetlands. Funding to bring about change is becoming available and innovative restoration methods are being developed and applied.

By viewing the work of artists such as Eugene von Guerard and early maps of the region, and by reading the descriptions written by European settlers it is possible to gain an understanding of the original ecological communities and landscapes. Modern precision mapping using techniques

such as LIDAR can reveal the profile of the wetlands, the artificial drainage channels and the natural drainage lines following the contours of the land.

Recent projects are redressing the complexity of past management practices and restoring significant wetland areas. The news is good, the changes in wetlands positive. Community members are starting to realise that healthy productive wetlands can be restored from dry cropped paddocks. Drained wetlands which were rarely productive, can be and are better off, restored. The consequences for biodiversity are very positive.

Greg talked about the Wannon River Delta, a 13 km^2 wetland complex at the base of the Grampians, which has suffered long-term degradation. The main wetlands in the delta are Walker Swamp, Gooseneck Swamp and Brady Swamp. Major alterations to the wetlands had occurred due to drainage, farming and plantation forestry. Past restoration attempts had failed due to perceived risks by landholders (both public and private). The long-term vision and effort of the Hamilton Field Naturalists Group, a park ranger, the NGT and the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority (GHCMA) were crucial to this complex's successful restoration. Support, resilience, patience and cooperation between all groups were required. The flexibility, resourcefulness and independence of NGT was crucial in addressing the complex land tenures, on-ground restoration and ongoing management.

Over the medium-term, success required NGT and GHCMA partnering and maximising opportunities as they arose. Initially GHCMA and state grants to NGT allowed trial hydrological restorations as well as the part purchase of a wetland in the complex, bed restoration and hydrological assessment. Subsequently NGT were able to leverage this support to gain further funding, including crowd sourcing the purchase of the remainder of the wetland. The ability of NGT to hold land tenure was a key element in the program.

The wetland complex had undergone 150 years of modification and the complexity and variety of past damage and nature of ongoing threats required a range of organisational, social and technical innovations to successfully carry out the restoration. Teams of volunteers enthusiastically helped with sand-bagging and revegetation.

After an immense amount of work, blocking and filling drains and restoring the ground profile to remove ridges created by forestry operations, these wetlands are now filling with winter run-off for the second year in a row. The water plants are returning to Walker Swamp and neighbouring wetlands. Along with the plants is a return of the aquatic fauna including crustaceans, fish and insects. The wetland birds are also returning. At nearby Green Swamp, also part of this system, up to 80 Brolga, 1200 swans and about 108 Double-banded Plover have been recorded. With

water levels now being held high enough for longer, water bird breeding success is returning. In 2020 Brolga attempted to nest for the first time in many years. The wetlands also provide important summer refuges for the water birds and migratory waders.

There is a lookout tower and bird hide at Walker Swamp which is open to the public. See map for how to get there. The tower is on Lynchs Crossing Road where it crosses through the dashed area shown on the map. Birdwatchers can also walk along the edge of the swamp although wet feet are a definite possibility and gumboots recommended.

Check out the NGT website for more information about Walker Swamp and other NGT reserves and you can also sign up for the NGT newsletter at no cost to hear about further developments: http://natureglenelg.org.au/get-involved/

- Euan Moore

Location of Walker Swamp outlined

Walkers Swamp before Blue Gum removal Photo Greg Kerr, NGT

Walker Swamp October 2020
Photo Mark Bachmann, NGT.

Brolga return to Walkers Swamp.
Photo NGT

November Observations (1942)

George Broadway

Observations made by the readers of "Wildlife" magazine in November 1942.
There were many fewer than usual that month; I wonder why. Perhaps people were too involved in the war effort to be taking note of nature. Anyway, here's what turned up. Note that by 1942 readers were often sending in specimens which had been sent in previously.

Insects

Northcote: Caterpillar of the Drinker Moth, *Pinara ferveus*, noted for its excellent camouflage. Described previously

Camberwell: Termites, otherwise called White Ants. Attack most kinds of wood, have been known to chew through lead to get to the wood. Do not attack Murray Pine and cedar which contain chemicals which they dislike.

Box Hill; and Windsor: Caterpillar of the Mottled Cup Moth, *Doratifera vulnerans.* Sent in many times. Well known in this area, sometimes a plague will defoliate many of our Eucalypts.

Botanical

Orbost: Your orchid specimen was rather shriveled by the time it reached me. (Australia Post tardy in those days ?) Appeared to be a Bird's Tongue Orchid *Chiloglottis.*

Springvale: Your flower was indeed an orchid even although perhaps not as spectacular as some others. It was one of the Leek Orchids *Prasophyllum* sp; Victoria has several.

Banyena Sth: Leek Orchid also

Windsor: A crumpled mass of grass had evidently been pushing against something hard so the growth had to be taken up kinks in the stem.

Burwood: The *Calendula* is a compound flower consisting of many individual florets. Sometimes a floret will throw a flowering shoot instead of forming seed and the result will be a whole bunch of small Calendulas growing on stalks from the one flower head. It is a not uncommon freak in cultivation.

Birds

Geelong: A Grebe I should think. The legs are not very apparent and are set well back on the body. Grebes are wonderful swimmers and divers, capable of swimming long distances under water.

Tooborac: White bird with long beak; if pointed, an Egret; if expanded at the end a Spoonbill. Your description would suggest a Royal Spoonbill.

Ararat: The call of the Blue Wren might be best described as a "warbling twitter" It is very difficult to describe in print or to imitate, or so I find. (Fortunately we now have apps on our phones which give us the call of every Australian bird)

General

Dromana: The little shells were *Helicella*, the little conical snail imported from Europe and now doing damage in our gardens. (My Father had plenty in Warrnambool but I have not seen them in Castlemaine)

Sunshine: When your box reached me it contained only grass: sorry!

Newport: If your cat waves its tail to the radio it must be only half asleep. A dog wags its tail when it is pleased; a cat when displeased. Perhaps the cat was annoyed because the music was keeping it awake, or did not appreciate your choice of music.

Inspiring Aussies to support bird conservation

Peter Turner

National Bird Week each October is run by BirdLife Australia with the aim of *"Inspiring Australians to take action and get involved in bird conservation efforts"*. A major activity during Bird Week is the annual Aussie Backyard Bird Count (ABBC), *"an activity for all ages that involves observing and counting the birds that live near you – whether that's in your garden, the local park, a beach or even your town centre. By telling us about the birds you've seen within a 20 minute period, you will help BirdLife Australia develop an understanding of local birds, whilst getting to know the wildlife on your doorstep!"*

Tanya Loos, BirdLife's Communication Coordinator, spoke about Bird Week and the ABBC to CFNC and BirdLife Castlemaine District (BCD) members, at the annual joint CFNC/BCD meeting on 14th November. Bird Week has a long history, originating in 1901 with RAOU's nomination of October 28th as Bird Day. Today BirdLife Australia has over 180,000 members and supporters, with 34 branches, 4 special interest groups, 2 observatories (Broome and Eyre) and 2 reserves (Clarkesdale and Glue Pot), and 20 Affiliated organisations and clubs. A primary aim is to "*stand together to stop the extinction*" of Australian birds, so many of which are threatened.

The annual ABBC aims to involve as many of the general community, including especially school children, as possible. So compared to BirdLife's regular programs and survey protocols, the emphasis is on simplicity – 20 minutes observation of birds by an individual or group in the backyard or another favourite outdoor space, using a simple smartphone app to identify and record species and numbers. In 2019, 88,270 people were involved, recording nearly 3.4 million birds. The ABBC is advertised as widely as possible before and during Bird Week through radio (e.g., ABC Classics week of birdsong inspired music), local papers and social media like Instagram. "Chief Counters" were sought amongst celebrities such as the former rugby star David Pocock.

Tanya discussed a few of the trends that have been seen in recent ABBC data, probably affected by the drought. For example, the White Ibis displaced Rainbow Lorikeets as the most frequently reported bird in 2019, and some unusual sightings included Crimson Chats, Trillers and Pied Honeyeaters well south of their normal ranges.

In addition to increasing interest in birds, it is hoped that the ABBC activities may be a gateway to BirdLife's other programs, such as the quarterly Birds in Backyards that also targets urban habitats, the use of the Birdata app for recording observations, and even the standard surveys. Extensive, long term bird observations collated by BirdLife are critical for reports such as the State of Australian Birds, that reveals the changes and threats. The greater the number of the general population who "*stand together to stop extinctions"*, the more effective lobbying will be to reverse the declines that have seen so many species at risk of disappearing.

Addendum from Tanya: This year's Aussie backyard bird count was the biggest ever - with nearly 5,000,000 birds counted. The huge participation rate is partly due to an increase in interest in birds because of the coronavirus lockdown but also due

to the great work of BirdLife branches around the country promoting the Count. I would like to acknowledge the great work that Jane Rusden and other BirdLife Castlemaine folks, and Terry White have done promoting the Aussie Backyard Bird Count in the Castlemaine media.

FrogID week, 6-15 November

FrogID is a great way to learn frog calls while providing scientists from the Australian Museum with valuable data for the protection and conservation of frogs. During FrogID week, we are asked to submit as many recordings of frogs from different locations as possible (aiming for one recording per pond, section of stream or wetland every night!).

For details on the FrogID app and how to submit your recordings: www.frogid.net.au

Wild Pollinator Spring Count, 8-15 November

Native insects are often overlooked as pollinators in crops and gardens. Here is a chance to learn about the native insects that pollinate the flowers in your garden or local park. Simply watch your favourite flowers for 10 minutes on a warm sunny day and count the native insects that visit. Submit your results using an easy online form. Your results will help build a database on wild pollinator activity and contribute to wild pollinator insect conservation in Australia. For instructions on how to count and help with identifying the insects: wildpollinatorcount.com

Birds of Sutton Grange October 2020

Nigel Harland

White-faced Heron
Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo
White-browed Scrubwren
Laughing Kookaburra
Long-billed Corella
Spotted Pardalote
Red Wattlebird
Rufous Whistler
White-necked Heron
Superb Fairywren
Australian Magpie
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Crimson Rosella
New Holland Honeyeater
Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Galah
Pallid Cuckoo
Red-browed Finch
Australian Raven
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Striated Pardalote
Welcome Swallow
Fan-tailed Cuckoo

Observations

Richard Piesse:

On a recent group walk at Jells Park, Glen Waverley, we were told there was a family of **Powerful Owls** along one of the tracks. After assistance in locating them, the two parents and their still-fluffy chicks were observed. Hard to photograph with a phone, but an inspiring, memorable sight.

Noel Young:

Heard **Painted Honeyeater/s** calling at the Railway Dam on the afternoon of 28th of September. Calls were brief and only 4 or 5 times in about an hour.

In mid October I was alerted to a **Tawny Frogmouth** nest in the Winters Flat area, and on the 20th was able to photograph one adult looking after two chicks (cover).

Photo Observations

I thought CFNC might be interested to know I found 2 colonies of **Slaty Helmet Orchid** this year, one large colony covering approx 20mx15m containing large patches of plants numbering in the 100's but only 1 flower found, and another smaller colony of approx 20 plants about 150m away but with about 6 flowers. I have included a couple of photos for your interest and give you permission to record/distribute this information if you wish.

Wayne Hollis, Dishpan Gully Rd, Chewton Bushlands

[Our Plant Database says "very rare in this district..." - Ed.]

Marli Wallace

I saw this Echidna being very busy in Kalimna Park on 18th October 2020.

Also in Kalimna Park -

Thelymitra rubra – Salmon Sun Orchid

Stylidium armera – Grass Trigger Plant

Peter Turner

October 3rd: When we lowered the external blind for the first time this year, Rosemary saw this Marbled Gecko (*Christinus marmoratus)* clinging to the inside if the material. Photo taken through double glazed window, with unusual lighting! When I tried to photograph it outside, it dropped down into ground cover and vanished.

October 18th:

Three young ravens raised nearby this season appear to have been poking around in our Red Box and Mallee trees, behaving a bit like giant honeyeaters seeking lerps. This one perched just above me in the backyard, and stayed there while I found the camera. It seemed to be pulling out small pieces of the Spitfire - Mottled Cup Moth caterpillar, *Doratifera vulnerans,* or just investigating a potential snack.

Judy and Phil Hopley

Caladenia tentaculata
Mantis Orchid

Calochilus robertsonii
Purple Beard Orchid

Calytrix tetragona
Fringe-myrtle, Maldon

Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Sun Orchids, Muckleford bush and elsewhere.

Thelymitra ixioides (Spotted)

T megcalyptra (Scented)

T pauciflora (Slender)

T rubra (Salmon Sun Orchid)

T antennifera (Rabbit's ear)

Diuris sulphurea (Tiger Orchid)
Rise and Shine reserve

Microtis unifolia (Onion Orchid)
The Monk

Caladenia clavescens
(Castlemaine Spider Orchid)

Noel Young Busy birds in October

Choughs nesting at the Rise and Shine Reserve – this nest is definitely a high-rise!

Grey Fantail constructing; Bee-eaters dig burrows in a sandy bank.

Striated Pardalotes aren't too fussy and will occupy anything that is appropriate – an old Bee-eater tunnel or an abandoned bottle-swallow nest. (Probably why they are such successful breeders). I have seen them use an old pipe, a hollow rail on an electricity pole, and my favourite was a drill hole high in the support wall of the Garfield Wheel.

Guest Speaker for November: Noushka Reiter

Saving orchids from extinction:

the RBGV Orchid Conservation Program

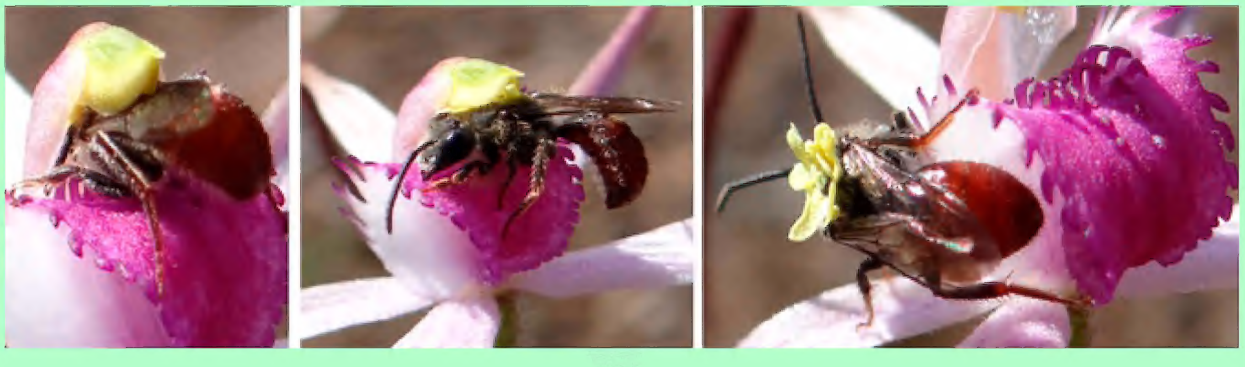
Noushka Reiter[1, 2], Richard Dimon[1], Marc Freestone[1,2]

[1] Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Cranbourne.
[2] Ecology and Evolution, Research School of Biology, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT

Since 2014 the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Orchid Conservation Program based at the Cranbourne site of RBGV, which includes a dedicated group of volunteers has grown a large ex-situ collection of orchids for conservation, introduction and education. Seeds are germinated symbiotically with their mycorrhizal fungi in the laboratory and grown in flasks before being potted up in the nursery. This ex-situ living plant conservation nursery now consists of over 20,000 plants from 165 species of orchid, including 68 state and nationally threatened species. A dedicated group of volunteers assist research staff in the curation and management of the collection, which holds many species brought back from the brink of extinction including *Caladenia pumila, Thelymitra mackibbinii, Caladenia audasii, Diuris fragrantissima* and *Prasophyllum correctum.*

The collection is now used extensively for seed orcharding of threatened orchids, pollination studies, taxonomy and conservation introductions. To date it has contributed to well over 50 introductions of threatened orchids across South eastern Australia including large scale introductions of 800-1,000 plants of nationally threatened species including *Caladenia colorata, Caladenia versicolor, Caladenia xanthochila* and *Caladenia fulva*.

Noushka will talk about the pollination ecology, mycorrhizal associations and introduction of four of the species she has been working on with her team; *Pterostylis basaltica, Thelymitra mackibbinii, Caladenia colorata* and *Caladenia versicolor*.



A wasp removing the pollinia (pollen bearing organ) from a flower of the Candy Spider Orchid, *Caladenia versicolor*.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

COMING EVENTS

Monthly meetings are being held on line via ZOOM during the epidemic restrictions, commencing at 7.30 pm. If you have registered for our previous webinar meetings you will be sent the link for registering with Zoom. If you have not joined before and wish to attend, please email Peter Turner at munrodsl@iinet.net.au

Our guest speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session when members can share recent interesting sightings with an option to show a photo by the 'share screen' option (if unfamiliar with this, please ask Peter for advice)

Friday Nov 13: NOUSHKA REITER: Conservation of threatened Orchids

Monday Nov 16: Roadside cleanup Organiser Geoff Harris. 9am start at the corner of Golf Links road on the Pyrenees Highway. Garbage bags and reflective vests will be supplied. Please note KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside.

Friday Dec 11: Member's night

This year Members' short reports, poems or slideshows will be online using Zoom, as for meetings this year. Those of you with items to present will be asked to send any photos or PowerPoint files to Euan Moore, who will arrange for the screen sharing of each item, while you talk us through your story.

In place of the usual supper, we plan to hold a BYO-everything early evening picnic in the Botanical Gardens, with numbers limited by the Covid-19 restrictions in place at that time. Details will be in the December newsletter.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, are being conducted online.

Club website (Web master: Ron Wescott) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Castlemaine Naturalist - email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

*Deadline for the December edition is 27th of November.

Subscriptions for 2020

Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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